Faith in Reading: Revisiting the Midrash–Theory connection[1]

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ABSTRACT

In the nineteen eighties there was a brief but intense period of interest amongst literary critics and theorists in Classical Rabbinic interpretation, and in particular, the genre of commentary known as Midrash. Interest concentrated around the apparent similarities between Midrash and the commentaries and criticism of Derrida, Lacan, Freud, Barthes and others. This essay examines this connection between Midrash and theory in light of the persistent charge from Foucault and others that all hermeneutics is essentially theological. It proceeds by drawing out the aims and frustrations of the literary critics and Jewish scholars involved, and considers in what ways the questions which arose in these years might be pertinent for contemporary literary criticism, theory and institutional practice.

> [B]aroque complexity (…) endless, nit–picking questions and endless suspensions or syncopes, forbidding firm conclusions (…) interminable digressions, each flying off at a different tangent (…) something like rabbinical Midrash.
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> —J. Hillis Miller, *For Derrida*

Prelude: Hermeneutic faith

Literary criticism may take place in secular institutions, but until it relinquishes the methods of reading inherited from religious textual scholarship, criticism will unwittingly repeat the same

theological gestures; hermeneutics presuppose faith, and in the absence of faith, superstition. This rebuke to literary hermeneutics, and in particular to close textual analysis, proves persistent. For Franco Moretti, 'close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction)' is '[a]t bottom … a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously'.[2] More recently, Heather Love has nuanced the opposition between close reading and Moretti's 'distant reading', encouraging us to read in a way which is 'close but not deep', but for Love too, the target is the 'sacred aspects of hermeneutics' that persist in 'the era of secular modernity.'[3] While there is certainly a connection between scriptural and literary hermeneutics, the 'incarnations' of Derrida's generation are a long way from what Harold Bloom called 'the days of my youth, when professors of literature were a secular clergy.'[4] This essay considers some aspects of literary hermeneutics—its inclinations and aspirations to the theological, but also its frustrations—by returning to the attempts in the 1980s by scholars in English and Jewish Studies departments to connect broadly deconstructive reading practices and theories to the tradition of Jewish scriptural exegesis known generally as midrash. The midrash-theory connection, as it would later be named, allows us to apply some pressure to the claim that theoretical literary reading is 'a theological exercise'. It opens once more the question of the dual inheritance of Anglophone scholarship, classical and Judeo-Christian. And it provides an opportunity to consider the relevance of those negotiations between literary studies and midrash for criticism today.

Before we begin, I want situate the debate briefly. By theory, I mean that particularly American phenomenon whereby European philosophy was imported and adapted to the work of literary criticism, notably in English and French departments (and not in philosophy).[5] The connection between theory and a number of high-profile literary critics had been cemented in 1979 by the publication of *Deconstruction and Criticism* which printed Derrida alongside Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man, all employed in a small number of East coast American departments. In short, 'theory' here signifies not Paris but Ithaca, Baltimore

and, above all, New Haven.[6] The distinction between theory and criticism was blurry at best, not least because breaking down that distinction was one of the points, but where possible, I will use 'criticism' to designate the work of the critics, and 'theory' for the continental work they drew upon.

It will also be helpful to outline what, for its detractors, *is* theological about literary hermeneutics. For this we can turn to Foucault, whose simultaneous presence in what Marc Redfield has called the French theory 'trinity', and opposition to the approaches of the other two (Derrida and Lacan), captures some of the inherent contradictions of the category.[7] In his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France,* Foucault stated that commentary 'exorcises the chance element of discourse by giving it its due; it allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on the condition that it is this text itself which is said, and in a sense, completed'.[8] Commentary, in the way Foucault uses the term here, covers all textual criticism; any discussion of what a text says or does requires paraphrase, but must add something of interest to that paraphrase if it is to be worthwhile. Yet what it adds must have been already implicit in the original, else it is unjustified. Thus the commentary both infinitely expands, and essentially preserves, the text upon which it comments; it can neither *be* 'the text itself', whose meanings it can only reproduce inexactly, nor can it venture to express a thought truly independent of it, or else it would become something else, such as philosophy or history, and so remains caught in this neither–nor position (this sentence being a case in point).[9] Our attempts to name the element of the text beyond what is already written will always amount to chasing ghosts. Such formulations recall the preface to *The Birth of the Clinic*, where Foucault writes:

> to comment is to admit by definition an excess of the signified over the signifier; a necessary, unformulated remainder of thought that language has left in the shade (…) By opening up the possibility of commentary, this double plethora dooms us to *an endless task that nothing can limit* (…) This is an exegesis, which listens, through the prohibitions, the

> symbols, the concrete images, through the whole apparatus of Revelation, to the Word of God, ever secret, ever beyond itself.[10]

Nothing in the commentary itself is theological for Foucault; rather, commentary is structurally theological. Since what appears is never enough, 'one has to re–state what has never been said.'[11] At best, commentary reproduces infinite longing, at worst, interminable prevarication.

Foucault's critique suggests why literary critics might be interested in scriptural hermeneutics—as the unrepressed version of their own craft, as it were. But it doesn't explain why proponents of modern literary theory in particular would willingly associate it with explicitly theological inquiry. Even to its detractors, theory never lacked self-awareness. Indeed, a restless concern with method draws theory and midrash together, and ultimately pushes them apart.

I close this introductory section with a brief chronology intended both to provide an overview of the episode for unfamiliar readers, and to emphasise its surprising brevity; the midrash-theory connection may have been 'a "hot" topic' in both literary studies and Jewish studies, as David Stern later noted, [12] but when one accounts for the time spent in press, the project in its original form was over almost as soon as it began:

1980	G. Douglas Atkins, 'Dehellenizing Literary Criticism' Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness*
1981	Inaugural issue of *Prooftexts* (Jewish studies journal interested in 'contemporary issues of textuality')
1982	Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses*
1983	Collaborative research project on literature and midrash at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (two years)
1984	David Stern, review of *The Slayers of Moses* in *Prooftexts*
1985	Handelman, response to Stern in *Prooftexts*
1986	Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick (eds), *Midrash and Literature* (resulting from the project at Jerusalem)
1987	Jacob Neusner, *Midrash as Literature*
1988	David Stern, 'Midrash and Indeterminacy'

	Elisa New, 'Pharaoh's Birthstool: Deconstruction and Midrash'

By the time that the fruits of the Jerusalem research project were published in 1986, the critique of the most ambitious version of the midrash-theory connection had already been articulated (notably by Stern and Neusner). At the end of the decade, the prospect of midrash as a mode of *literary* criticism had fallen away. In the years following, those in Jewish studies sympathetic to theory studied the application of theoretical concepts to biblical reading.[13] In English departments, the question was largely historicised, producing compelling comparisons of hermeneutic methods, but eliding the riven question of 'doing' midrash.[14] The interaction between literary and Jewish studies ultimately emphasized disciplinary divisions rather than overcoming them. I do not aim to rehabilitate the debate in its initial form, but to analyse why it unfolded as it did, to ask what literary criticism desired from midrash in those optimistic early inquiries and, given that it didn't get what it wanted, to consider where it was left.

Midrash as critical method

Why were American literary critics, steeped in 'French theory', psychoanalysis and deconstruction, drawn to Midrash, a body of Jewish homiletic and exegetical commentary produced between 200 and 800 CE, and to its associated methods?[15] The Classical Rabbinic tradition placed the study of texts at the centre of life.[16] It is to be expected that literary critics would warm to people like themselves. But there are much more significant reasons for this particular attraction. One striking hermeneutic assumption in Midrash is that every element of scripture is meaningful, 'nothing in it is arbitrary, let alone without meaning'.[17] Every detail is available: 'not only the meaning of terms and words, but also their shapes and sounds, the *te'amim* (the musical signs added to the Hebrew words), the *tagin* (the small decorative additions to the letters)', details unavailable in translation, and therefore in Christian scholarship in Latin or

vernacular languages.[18] This means that no element of the text can be dismissed as contingent. Tiny redundancies are resolved by ingenious means.[19] If there is no opposition between form and content (or word and spirit, the polemical Christian analogue), readers are at least somewhat protected from the charges of under- and over-interpretation, literalism and excessive imagination. Hartman would later comment that

> What we call 'rhetoric' and 'poetics'—arts indebted to Greek and Roman thought—did not separate out as technical branches of knowledge during the formative period of talmudic Judaism.[20]

In Hartman's account Biblical Hebrew returns as a language which eludes the poverty of the form/content binary—the weightless meaning and the arbitrary sign. However brilliant Paul de Man's deconstruction of Wordsworth's boy of Winander, however rigorous and tender Hartman's account of Wordsworth's 'elation' or 'muteness', one cannot avoid feeling that the poet is being given something he did not already possess.[21] Their brilliance always runs the risk of transcendence. By contrast, Midrash 'refuses to produce a new or transformed writing'; it will not deviate, and 'looks for more of the original in the original, for more story, more words within the words.'[22]

For the Rabbis, every element of scripture holds 'an infinity of significances'; 'every word of the Torah is pregnant with an immensity of meanings'.[23] From this it also follows that no human could ever grasp the whole significance, and thus multiple interpretations can be simultaneously legitimate. 'Rabbi Eleazar', Joseph Dan notes, 'was not bothered by the contradictions, apparent or real, involved in interpreting the same verse many times according to different midrashic methods.'[24] The tolerance for multiple interpretations permits the Midrash 'a combination of different and variegated ways of reading a single text, maintaining all of its details (such as its spelling or word order), completing its gaps, solving real or imagined contradictions found within it, and explaining and interpreting it in every possible way, sometimes with absolute disregard for its literary or linguistic context.'[25] All these interpretations form, in Avigdor

Shinan's striking image, 'a giant upside–down pyramid with a small apex, the Bible'.[26] To a modern eye, there is something pleasingly outrageous about the interpretive latitude. Certainly as a literary critic one is sometimes tempted to trample over the common-sense meaning of a sentence that undermines one's otherwise brilliant explanation. And because nobody could purport to know the thinking of God, there is no question of a Rabbi being confronted with a dry appeal to 'the author's intended meaning'.[27] Faithful to the meaning of every word, letter and diacritical mark, interpretation can take great liberties.

In Hartman's *Criticism in the Wilderness,* Biblical criticism serves as a point of favourable comparison. Modern (demystified) criticism, Hartman hints in the opening essay, is caught between believing literature's invention too credulously and dismissing it with unnecessary scepticism, at least in part because it lacks the faith held by 'the older Hermeneutics'.[28] At the beginning of another essay, he remarks:

> The rabbinical or patrisitic exegete was creative within a scrupulosity as exacting as any invented by extreme apostles of the Catholic or Puritan conscience; he pretended not to violate the letter of Scripture or else he took pleasure in the strict counterpoint of letter and spirit, of apparent meaning and recreative commentary. The puritanism (small *p*) of so much critical writing today, its modest but unconvincing subservience to art, comes from the realization that now it is we who put the restraint on ourselves; it is from the individual critic that the check on subjective or wild interpretation must come.[29]

If literary criticism is spilt theology, for Hartman it is also paradoxically more pious; precisely because 'the rabbinical or patrisitic exegete' can invoke higher powers, his or her interpretation can risk more. If we hear in Hartman's wish for creativity and scrupulosity the virtuosic risk–taking prized by deconstruction, we might also detect the anxiety of its detractors that interpretive violations, pleasurable or otherwise, represented an attack on literary meaning and value. Hartman's subsequent discussions of Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida fail to displace his nostalgia for the controlled energy of religious exegesis. Of the four "'other worlds" that

tempt the interpreter' in 'Past and Present', the first is 'the midrashic or polysemous world of biblical interpretation, where extremely bold hypotheses and strict rules of exegesis keep company'.[30] The other three are all roughly contemporary movements in theory: existential hermeneutics (Heidegger), dialogism, and 'the conceptual, even noumenal, rhetoric' which Hartman uses with some elasticity to encompass writers 'from Claude Lévi–Strauss and Jacques Lacan to Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida'.[31] Midrash, implicitly, is presented as a species of Continental theory.

If the hermeneutic freedom of Midrash appeals, so too does its style. As if anticipating the playful approaches of theory, 'midrashic discourse mixes text and commentary, violating the boundaries between them and intentionally blurring the differences, flourishing (…) between exegesis and literature'.[32] And anyone partial to the extreme punning and digression of Lacan and Derrida will enjoy finding in Midrash 'an intrepid delight in word play, an imaginative precocity and a resistance to what is nowadays called closure akin to the most daring of deconstructionist acrobatics'.[33]

The midrash-theory connection, however, was not built on the mere comparison between midrash and contemporary criticism; what brought the two together was ultimately the suggestion that there might be a shared *method* to midrash and theory. Hartman intimated that they might be analogous 'worlds'. G. Douglas Atkins went further by 'suggesting what at least some of the "Yale critics" seem aware of: their opposition to Hellenism and the classical logos derives from notions strikingly similar to Hebraic and biblical thought.'[34] For Atkins, critics had been 'dehellenizing literary criticism' for some time. But Atkins defines 'Hebraism' very broadly indeed: 'Bloom … "prefers the morality of the Hebrew Bible to that of Homer" … signs of Hebraism appear variously in Miller's work in the 1960s, and as early as 1954 Hartman was writing in *The Unmediated Vision* about immersion in experience itself at the expense of a transcendent principle.'[35]

The continuity between midrash and theory is articulated more precisely in Susan Handelman's book *The Slayers of Moses: The emergence of rabbinic interpretation in modern literary theory*, whose title alludes provocatively to Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. Handelman contends that a group of more-or-less secular Jews—Freud, Lacan, Derrida, Bloom—were the inheritors of the Jewish sacred exegetical tradition (note Lacan's honorary Judaism). Handelman traces from midrash to deconstruction a persistent, if marginalized, alternative to 'Hellenic' modes of philosophy. Rather than assert direct historical links between her theorists and rabbinic tradition, Handelman poses 'striking and profound *structural* affinities' with Rabbinic models of interpretation.[36] Hence, 'the Biblical view was a kind of "deconstruction" of the classical idea' and 'the Rabbinic world is, to use a contemporary term, one of *intertextuality*.'[37] In this way, historical midrash can be aligned with contemporary opposition to metalanguage in Barthes, Derrida and Lacan. The metaphysics of presence and the Christian attitude to scripture (which prizes Christ *qua* body over the book) are, in important respects for Handelman, the same thing.[38] Synthetic work like this performed two important functions: it substantiated the claims that there *was* a midrash-theory connection and it provided a historical grounding for contemporary criticism. The book was therefore both affirmed and substantiated the wider attempt 'to find a genealogy, a precursor, for theory itself' at a time when, we should remember, it stood accused of 'destroying literary studies'.[39]

Two more reasons for attraction need to be mentioned. Firstly, the episode was a rare, genuine moment of interdisciplinarity. What looks like interdisciplinarity often turns out to be quasi-transcendental: one field claims ownership of the other's conditions of possibility, as in the relation of philosophy of science to science or, more recently, of neuroscience to various fields of the humanities. And when they do engage, disciplines often turn to another for expert witnesses, invoked to back up what one already believes, but cannot itself prove, or else as a cannibal, hoping to fatten itself by consuming the other outright. But unlike the Bible-as-literature criticism project which, Stern later asserted, was one more attempt to appropriate

Hebrew texts for Christian scholarship, here 'the academy seemed to be authentically excited about something Jewish'.[40] What is more, Hartman and Sanford Budick's edited volume, *Midrash and Literature*, contained authors from Jewish studies (David Stern, Moshe Idel) and literary critics (Frank Kermode, Jill Robbins), and concluded with an appendix of 'contemporary midrash' which reprinted Derrida's essay 'Shibboleth' and Edmund Jabès' 'The Key'. While the volume was published in New Haven, and not Jerusalem, and although both editors' experience was squarely in English literature (romantic and seventeenth–century poetry, respectively) it is a shared enterprise, in which no worldview or method dominates. Indeed, Lilian Furst and Michael Goldberg's objection that 'it takes two people even to do a review' signalled the book's success as much as its shortcomings.[41]

Finally, it must be acknowledged that Midrash was discussed in English departments in a manner that at least somewhat exoticised it. Sometimes the rhetoric recalls the moves by feminist scholars to 'recover' women's writing, and such rhetoric emphasised the alleged marginality of the Jewish as an 'alien' and 'subterranean influence'.[42] Midrash can 'remind secular literary studies of the richness and subtlety of those strange rabbinic conversations which have been disdained for so long in favour of more objective and systematized modes of reading.'[43] At the same time, the turn to Midrash allowed readers familiar with *Glas* the thrill of recognizing its interlaced text and commentary in the pages of the Talmud. (*The Slayers of Moses* actually re–prints a page of *Glas*.)[44] Already in this juxtaposition we can see tension: the Hebrew material is valued *both* on the grounds of its proximity to contemporary theory *and* its supposedly alien qualities.

What unites all of those advocating a midrash-theory connection is the suggestion that Derrida's deconstruction, Lacan's seminars, Freud's interpretation of dreams and indeed good literary criticism in general share something of importance with the playful and exacting midrashic commentary. But when one ventures claims about particular concepts, difficulties arise. By asserting the structural likeness of allusion in midrash and intertextuality in Derrida and Lacan, for instance, Handelman's book can seem to position theory as the successor to midrash

('the *Slayers* of Moses', no less), implying that contemporary scholars of Midrash studied a dead language, while theory constituted a living word. The Hebrew scholars had, one suspects, heard that one before. Hartman and Budick's introduction softened Handelman's syncretism, declaring interest in both

> the historical, cultural, Judaic phenomenon of midrash itself, and the resemblances between midrash and highly similar critical phenomena which, for whatever reasons, have acquired central importance in contemporary literature, criticism and theory. Of course, resemblance is not identity.[45]

The crucial phrase here is also the least assuming: 'for whatever reasons'. Indeed, it suggests that resemblances might be the most we can know, and that the reasons must be bracketed out. Handelman's claim of inheritance is weakened to one of family resemblance, but Hartman and Budick expressed similar desires for practical knowledge. For literary criticism, what made midrash attractive was ultimately the prospect of methodological innovation, but taking midrash as a method requires an abstraction which exposes the inherent tension in the project.

Criticism and difference

Midrash and Literature is an ambivalent book. It represents the apex of interdisciplinary cooperation, and contains the germ of the critique which would end it. In his chapter, Stern contends that Midrash 'touches upon literature not at the point where literature becomes exegesis but at what might be called its opposite conjunctions, where exegesis turns into literature and comes to express its own language and voice'.[46] Stern's approach is characteristic of those in Jewish studies who wished to engage with theory while retaining the historical and textual specificity of midrashic commentary. In practical terms, if one studies Midrash itself, it can be 'literature' with 'its own language and voice', but if one is to think of midrash as a method, it must bear no *essential* link to scripture. The dispute, at its heart, focused on how far

one could abstract the notion of midrash and still use the term. As Betty Roitman noted in her chapter, 'the mobility and indeterminacy of midrash no doubt explains its attractiveness to present–day theoreticians who understand midrash in a way that feeds their faith in an infinite unfolding of textual signification. But this contemporary adaptation (…) involves some considerable adaptation of the données of midrash.[47] Roitman's 'considerable adaptation' is a charitable way to signal grave differences.

The key problem concerns the categorical opposition between Hebrew and Hellene criticism. Inevitably, the comparison of midrash to theory tended to reify midrash as something discrete and stable, when, as Daniel Boyarin notes, 'Midrashic texts were produced over a period of more than a thousand years, and therefore, show different rhetorical and hermeneutic styles'.[48] To suppose midrash and theory to be categories sufficiently similar and uniform to compare is to make caricatures of them. In his combative review of *The Slayers of Moses* in *Prooftexts*, Stern accuses Handelman of reifying 'the rabbinic–patristic distinction (…) making her own position seem as literalistic and dichotomous as the one she attributes to the Greeks and the Christians'.[49] The fiery version of the categorical objection comes from Jacob Neusner, who contends that the term midrash should be rejected because 'as a category, *midrash* meaning simply all "Jewish" or "Judaic exegesis" but no gentile exegesis rests upon self–referential, therefore essentially inherent (that is, racist) lines. Appeals to innate traits (…) settle no important questions for reasonable people'.[50] Neusner goes on to indict 'Kugel and those others published in the book edited by Hartman (and his colleagues in the sectarian literary journal, *Prooftexts*)' for deceiving 'their gentile colleagues, both allies and otherwise, who, not being Jewish, assume both that the literature at hand has been accurately represented'.[51] Without going so far, it is clear that while the historical practice of midrash was part of Jewish history, the historical sense in which midrash is Jewish cannot simply be extended to the abstract account implied by any suggestion that contemporary criticism might be, or might benefit from being, midrashic.

Beyond this sort of critique, though, scholars from Jewish studies provided nuanced reasons to qualify the connections between midrash and theory. Dan writes:

> The midrash (from a functional point of view) is the result of the inherent paradox which haunts a religion based upon a body of sacred scriptures: the conflict between the wish and the need to innovate, and the religious maxim which states that all truth is to be found in the scriptures. This means that, in order to be true, every new statement should be old. The midrashic technique is the traditional Jewish answer to this paradox.[52]

Hence, as David Stern writes in 'Midrash and Indeterminacy', the 1988 *Critical Inquiry* article which consolidated his critique of Handelman, 'the Rabbis consciously, happily, assume the stance of belatedness. (…) Polysemy in midrash, then, is to be understood as a claim to textual stability rather than its opposite'.[53] Indeterminacy in midrash, Stern insists, is not the endless shifting of the signifier, but the agglutination of all the infinities of scripture. What may have appeared compatible with the Derridean project, in other words, is really 'a recuperation of presence'.[54] Midrash is thus opposed in important ways to the deconstructive project to which, for Handelman, it bore strong resemblance. A simple distinction: deconstruction finds that what the text articulates is at odds with the articulation itself; the textual undermines the hermeneutic. For Midrash, the textual generates ever more significance; it is coal for the hermeneutic fire. The multiple interpretations of midrash (its recurrent *davar aher*, 'another interpretation') which appear so attractive to the literary critic are produced, Dan and Stern suggest, not by exegetical technique but by the special status of the text being read.[55] They approach similar exegetical assumptions (polysemy, intertextuality) from different directions. '[T]he seamless knit between the text and its interpretation may obtain (…) owing to the postmodern dearth of authority, or to the infinite authority of a God whose text encompasses everything', Elisa New writes. 'The radically sacred and the radically secular dovetail here in an unsettling way'.[56]

Reviewing Handelman, Stern also makes a striking accusation: by claiming a sacred inheritance for literary theory, Handelman is betraying its 'profoundly secular background' in an

'intellectual, not religious (…) act of idolatry.'[57] If literary criticism is for Foucault and others too theological, for Stern it is nowhere near theological enough to support Handelman's comparisons. In this debate it can be difficult to separate the question of intellectual territory from the dispute about hermeneutics. Handelman unfairly takes Stern's critique to be a simple historian's wish to discuss 'what midrash "reflects" of its historical background' at the expense of the literary critic's insight into 'language and textuality'.[58] Stern likewise gives a less than generous account of Handelman's theoretical readers 'who (at least the way she describes them) seem to be mainly interested in ruthlessly trumping their literary predecessors'.[59] Even the way Handelman is introduced to readers of *Prooftexts* emphasises disciplinary boundaries ('Susan A. Handelman, who teaches English at the University of Maryland').[60] This matters because the engagement between midrash and theory is always at risk of collapsing into a problem of description, as if the literary critics describe midrash inadequately and the midrash critics describe theory imperfectly, and if only both descriptions were corrected we would know one way or the other whether the two fit together. The difficulty is much more substantial than this.

An asymmetry exists between midrash and theory because theory already contains an internal opposition between Hebrew and Hellene. As Miriam Leonard has shown, the long-standing debate between 'Greek' and 'Jewish' thought—between Socrates and Moses—in Western philosophy played an important role in the articulation of Enlightenment universalism. To simplify Leonard's nuanced discussion: the Hebrew/Hellene opposition provides a way for Christian philosophers to renegotiate their intellectual heritage and claim ownership of classical philosophy; '[l]ike Hamann, Kant sketches a continuity between Hellenism and Christianity, a continuity that is based on the antithetical characteristics of Judaism and Christianity.' [61] And Hegel's subsequent critique of Kant is analogous to his critique of Judaism; both are too dependent on positivistic laws and must be surpassed; Hegel overcomes Kant, and Hegel's rarefied Christianity the religion of Abraham. Indeed, 'Christianity's triumph is to liberate itself of Judaism by revealing itself as always already Greek.'[62] The Hebrew/Hellene comparison has

long been polemical; 'not that the Christians and the Jews read absolutely differently' but that Christians wanted to '*make* an absolute difference between Jews and Christians and to accuse Jews of mistaken or wrong interpretations' to defend their own.[63] As a result, European philosophy is already implicated in the Hebrew/Hellene opposition, including the late twentieth-century kinds that became 'theory'. When Derrida begins 'Violence and Metaphysics' with an epigraph from *Culture and Anarchy*, he summons Arnold's 'immersion in language of racial typology' as well as his efforts to adapt that language to questions of English culture.[64]

To put the problem another way: the question of 'connecting' theory to Midrash gets stuck because that theory can neither resolve, nor propel itself beyond, the long history of Hebrew and Hellene oppositions. 'Hebraism … has always been severely preoccupied with an awful sense of the impossibility of being at ease in Zion', Matthew Arnold wrote.[65] And Derrida's Jewishness can be understood as an opposition to 'the Greco-European adventure [that] is in the process of taking over all of humanity'.[66] But if this is *all* there is—an opposition to 'Greco-European' universalism, 'an awful sense' of 'impossibility'—this is no more than the mere *inversion* of the (Christian) narrative of intellectual progress in which 'Jewish' particularities are replaced by 'Greek' universals. Thus when John Caputo characterizes Derrida's Jewishness in terms of 'the place of the Jew, the place of the displaced, [that] is always occupied by someone, whatever their name', we no longer need the language of race.[67] It is comparable to Lacan's category of woman: the marginal, the not-all, the position which refuses totality[68] and the sexing or racializing of a structural position that is not essential to a sex or race is, at the very least, difficult. Saying nothing of Paul de Man, deconstruction's relation to Jewishness is fraught. And the question of Derrida's Jewish *faith* remains contested.[69] Yet nor can the structural (philosophical, political) position be separated from the historical (ethnicity, religion, community) without violence. Between a general position which anyone could in principle occupy and the particular experience of a historical group, 'the oscillation and the undecidability continue', Derrida writes; '[i]n any case, I have been unable to put a stop to this experience in me'.[70] To cleave one way or the other

is to give up something important. It is reductive to merely historicize theory; an appeal to Jewish history (or worse, ethnicity) cannot *explain* deconstruction, or psychoanalysis. But if we abstract from the particulars of that history, until all that is left is an abstract, structural position (a taste for the marginal, latent, unstable or impossible, a claim against totality) we have not put the Hebrew/Hellene opposition to rest but made the most 'Greek' move of all: setting aside historical particularity by claiming to overcome it.

The intuition of a connection between theory and midrash seems promising, but any attempt to explain that connection on the grounds of Jewishness is destined to get stuck. The question of whether theory, or particular concepts, are 'Jewish', cannot be posed without resolving a vast debate over the relation of Western philosophy to history, a debate in which theory itself, being thoroughly implicated, cannot resolve. It may seem that the problem can be avoided by ignoring questions of identity and metaphysics, and concentrating on method. After all, literary criticism routinely appropriates the techniques of history, sociology and philosophy without necessarily addressing the intellectual disagreements between the fields. But from the perspective of professional students of Midrash, the *a priori* differences between scripture and literature cannot be waved away, and any attempt to do so appears not only cavalier with regard to scripture, but also careless in its handling of literature's own singularity.

By 1988, a project to synthesize midrash and theory became untenable. *Midrash and Literature* was not followed by further collaborative interdisciplinary work. In 1994, Hartman advised, in lieu of collaboration or synthesis, that we 'ask not what deconstruction may do for Midrash; [but] ask what Midrash may do for deconstruction'.[71] In the introduction to *Midrash and Theory* (1996), Stern responds that his purpose is 'to ask not what midrash can do for literary criticism but what theory has done to midrash'.[72] On this basis, the two part ways. In short, the midrash–theory connection 'was too good to be true, at least in its more exaggerated, idealized, and apologetic expressions'.[73] Having worked though the interactions between the fields, it is possible to respond to the contention that theoretical reading, insofar as it remains hermeneutic,

is 'a theological exercise'. Derrida and Freud, for instance, can be said to assume the infinity of the text (call it textual instability or interminable analysis). Nobody would deny Walter Benjamin 'the whole apparatus of Revelation' (Foucault's phrase). Lacan and Cixous fit Foucault's description of theological readers, as do the 'Yale' practitioners of the 1980s (de Man, Bloom, Hartman, Hillis Miller, Shoshana Felman), who are willing to read beyond what is written in order to capture what *is* written. Foucault's complaint is, in other words, that purportedly secular commentary remains all too Hebrew. In making the midrash-theory connection, the differences did not trouble the literary critics. But when those in Jewish studies reaffirmed the theological commitments of the Rabbis, the project began to fall apart. Faced with a concrete example of properly theological reading, the differences became clear. Affirmations of presence are unavailable to it; theory must ruin the sacred truths.

Retrospect: After midrash and theory

Returning to these questions a generation later, the project of aligning contemporary criticism with a body of exegesis separated by genre, geography and so much history can seem quaint. But insurmountable differences are what makes the comparison useful: Midrash exists outside of the (Euro-centric) Hebrew/Hellene opposition; it becomes available to our thinking about criticism today on the basis of those differences. Hartman, always much more ambivalent about literary criticism's claim to be secular, was from the beginning conscious of acting in an idolatrous way towards profane poetry. 'Our imitation of sacred exegesis is consciously archaic or a mock–up unless we believe in authority; that of the sacred text and, by extension, of our own, critical text', he wrote in 1980.[74] If literary critics were attracted to midrash because they recognized elements they prized in their own work, and the theorists they read, those critics were also attracted to those elements their work could not have. 'Faith and grace, albeit secularized, are the indispensable hermeneutic tools', writes Antoine Compagnon.[75] But tools cannot be

altered without changing the nature of the craft; if criticism is to be faithful, or indeed graceful, it must be so in different ways. The midrash-theory connection speaks to a shapeless wish for new kinds of readerly diligence and play. In this final section, I reflect on some of the ways in which midrash remains a worthwhile point of comparison to hermeneutic practices and institutional conventions in contemporary literary studies not in spite, but because, of their differences.

The Rabbis' belatedness turns a (supposed) lack of originality into an index of faithfulness to the text. In Anglophone literary criticism it would be hard to admit to reading belatedly, even if it were true that one has no original ideas. Drawing a different comparison, Eric Hayot writes:

> If you grew up in China, (…) you will have learned that one of the most epistemologically powerful things an essay can do—especially if written by a junior scholar—is to show that its arguments resemble those of an existing authority figure. This is usually proved by parallel citation. Unfortunately, that structure has little truth–value in the U.S. context, where a strong emphasis on originality (and on telling the reader how exactly you are original) means that you produce epistemological strength by *distancing* yourself from at least some of the experts in your field.[76]

Anglophone academic publishing demands novelty as a condition of entry, even as it demands that however novel, the interpretation will yet be an accurate account of the text. Interpretations are, therefore, presumed to improve; not like Moore's law, perhaps, but at least like competing products in a marketplace. Nevertheless, it might be possible to think about belated interpretation, so that Pierre Bayard's clever recent sketch of 'anticipatory plagiarism', which insists that literary influence travels backwards as well as forwards, can be turned on its head.[77] Rather than say that newness or originality can proliferate backwards through literary history, so that Sophocles is revealed as a plagiarist of Freud, we might say that the power of Freud's interpretation of culture derives from a certain lack of originality. The persuasive force of much of Freud's writing, like that of Sartre and certain other strains of phenomenology, relies on its

reader's recognition of something they already knew—it relies on the 'shock of the old'. It is not that Freud failed to be original, but rather that he succeeded, far more than most, in making his readers feel that a very old story was occurring all around them. One merit, at least, of a more belated approach to criticism would be to downplay the importance of *mere* newness, which occurs at both ends of the methodological spectrum: the clamour for fresh, un-studied manuscripts on the one hand, and the tendency to treat theory as 'disruptive innovation' on the other. Regarding New Historicism and, more recently, 'new lyric studies', Redfield remarks: 'the fact that in the American academy everything always has to be "new" does not, of course, protect against repetition'.[78]

In a similar way to belatedness, the status of the contradiction marks a sticking point between criticism and midrash, even if we believe in something like the infinite significances of Shakespeare. 'To read Dickens and Shakespeare is now to read the history of what has been and might be made of them', Steven Connor has recently contended.[79] But that long history, with its reversals and revisions, is rarely understood as the dialectical unfolding of knowledge about Shakespeare so much as a clearing–house of competing interpretations. Institutional organization reflects this; there are many undergraduate survey courses on Shakespeare and few on the history of Shakespeare criticism. Criticism, but never literature, can be dismissed as outdated (if it is outdated to study it, this fact counts against its claim to literary qualities). Contradictions must be cast out as mistakes and falsehoods in criticism and teaching alike. Imagine the following pedagogical experiment: a class in which students were asked to produce several contradictory interpretations of the same poem, and assessed on the basis of how rigorous their commentaries are, but penalized for giving accounts which are compatible with one another. It would be far more taxing, and the results likely far more compelling, than requiring students to be *correct* about romantic period lyrics.

If contradictory interpretations can be tolerated, it is no longer necessary to prove all others wrong in order to be right. Literary criticism's own *davar aher*, so to speak, is the

invocation that 'existing research in the field overlooks …' In the grant application and the journal article, there must be a 'gap in the scholarship' through which each new work exposes the ignorance and partiality of the last. And given the demands exerted on those writing the grant applications and articles, such gaps are inevitably found. But the economy of critical insight does not need to run on the currency of others' wrongness; interpretation is not a zero–sum game. (Consider the unhappy case of E.D. Hirsch trying to adjudicate between two 'equally coherent and self-sustaining' interpretations of Wordsworth.)[80] When interpretive contradiction is thinkable, when the thankless work of trying to dismiss everyone else can be put aside, criticism becomes less risk-averse on its own account. Hartman speaks approvingly of criticism which 'can dare to go wrong'.[81] Similarly, '[t]he term "error" has for de Man a furious conceptual energy', Stanley Corngold comments, noting his enthusiasm in *Blindness and Insight* for 'the part truth of error'.[82] Of course, it is easier to appreciate the other fellow's wrongness. But in his reading of 'wrong poetry', Keston Sutherland reminds us of Adorno's injunction against the wish to be right above all:

> Nothing is more unfitting for an intellectual resolved on practising what was earlier called philosophy, than to wish, in discussion, and one might almost say in argumentation, to be right.[83]

The alternative in this sketch is dialectical philosophy, which learns 'not to *reject* wrong (…) but, more onerously, to *be* wrong and by that fundamental advance to lose itself'.[84] The charge that criticism puts its own rightness first, and would rather be impervious to objections than risk engaging with its object in ways that might expose it to criticism, also appears in Bruno Latour's oft–cited essay against the sort of critique which, he tells us, has 'run out of steam': '[d]o you see now why it feels so good to be a critical mind? Why critique, this most ambiguous *pharmakon*, has become such a potent euphoric drug? You are always right!'[85] What would criticism which did not seek primarily to be right look like? The charm of Freud's dream work, but also its deep interpretive power, stem from its tendency to generate 'wrong' interpretations of the day's

residues, in whose unconcealed wrongness (that is, transgression) lies the possibility of cognitive leaps excluded from diurnal thought, and in those leaps, insight otherwise unavailable. To think about this belatedly: in a sense, textual scholarship has, since the medieval period, been a working through of error. 'Narratives of scholarship always seem to take error as their subject', Seth Lerer writes. 'They correct the mistakes of others, but they also expose the ways in which the wrong, the errant, the displaced are central to the makings of professional identity.'[86] Although criticism cannot be wrong in the same way as the unconscious mind, or contradictory in the same way as Midrash, we might yet ask in what ways criticism can relinquish its demand for rightness, so that wrong discoveries may throw up as much of interest and value as those which are the most insistently right.

Midrash may have proven attractive to some in literary studies because it aroused the latent 'weak messianism' in their own practices. To that extent Foucault's critique lands a blow. But rather than say that those critics were simply mistaken or superstitious, we might see the intuition that theory could be a contemporary midrash not as 'a falsehood but merely a claim unfulfilled by men'.[87] Neither criticism's alleged theologism nor its genuine lack of faith justify its dismissal unless one already expected it to *be* social science or religion. Separating out literary criticism from the properly faithful exegesis by its side further exposes another kind of wishful thinking: for the sort of criticism that keeps its object at arm's length rather than risk accusations of fetishism or misplaced devotion, as if they were they only kinds of commitment available. Further, the encounter between midrash and theory suggests a way forward for interdisciplinary work other than one field's subservience to, or cannibalism of, the other: instead, a relation of mutual provocation that, when handled well, can interrupt the automatic gestures and settled conclusions of each field that stand in the way of thinking. In the absence of the faith invested in scripture by the devout, a space opens for criticism which is severe and yet joyful, insightful yet unafraid of error, unfinished but not insufficient. The 'endless task' of criticism which draws Foucault's ire and the charge of theologism represents not the fullness of God's infinity, but an

infinity with no redemptive endpoint, only the hum of interpretation endlessly unfolding, each stroke 'bringing short–lived meanings to long–lived words.'[88] For criticism, the significance of literature is not guaranteed in advance by the special status of the author, but sustained by the whole history of interpretive work devoted to it; not faith in reading, but strenuous affection.

NOTES

[1] For their generous comments on earlier versions of this essay I am grateful to Marshall Brown and to Daniel H. Weiss, who suggested the pedagogical experiment in the final section.

[2] Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures On World Literature', *New Left Review* 1 (2000), 54–68, 57.

[3] Heather Love, 'Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn', *New Literary History* 41 (2010), 371–391, 372.

[4] Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 93.

[5] See François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[6] See Gerald Graff, 'Fear and Trembling at Yale' *The American Scholar* 46:4 (1977), 467-478; Marc Redfield, *Theory at Yale: The Strange Case of Deconstruction in America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[7] Redfield, *Theory at Yale,* 5.

[8] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in *Untying the Text: A Post–Structuralist Reader* edited by Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1991), 58.

[9] This is also a question of how much latitude one permits those other categories, philosophy and history. Most sympathetic readers of Derrida would qualify his work as philosophy despite virtually all his work being, generically speaking, criticism of other texts.

[10] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* translated by A.M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003), xviii–xix, my emphasis.

[11] Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, xvii–iii.

[12] David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 1.

[13] For example, Edward L. Greenstein, 'Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative' *Prooftexts* 9 (1989), 43–71; Daniel Boyarin, 'Inner Biblical Ambiguity, Intertextuality and the Dialectic of Midrash: The Waters of Marah' *Prooftexts* 10 (1990), 29–48. In what follows, however, I purposely bracket literary theory's ongoing roles in Jewish studies, which have been explored at length in David Stern's 1996 *Midrash and Theory*.

[14] See Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992) and Joel Weinsheimer, *Eighteenth–Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993). Peter Szondi's *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics* was published in English two years later. One laudable exception to this turn away from 'doing' literary critical midrash was Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[15] For a general overview of midrash, see "Midrash", "Midrashic Literature" in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 2nd Edition Volume 4., Edited by Fred Skolnik et al., (Farmington Hills, MI: MacMillan Reference, 2007), 183–4; Steven D Fraade, 'Rabbinic Midrash and Ancient Jewish Biblical Interpretation' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* Edited by Charlotte E. Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99–120. As discussed below, the use of 'midrash' as a stable and singular term referring both to the exegetical technique(s) and a corpus (really, multiple corpora) of commentaries is problematic, but it is important in recounting the history of the 'Midrash–theory connection' that we proceed on the assumption that the premise makes sense.

[16] Indeed, Jacob Neusner traces the origins of Rabbinic Judaism to the scribal class who existed prior to the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, 'to whom the ideal of study of Torah, rather than the piety of the cult and the replication of that cultic piety in one's own home, was central.' Jacob Neusner, *Understanding Rabbinic Judaism, from Talmudic to Modern Times* (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1974), 18.

[17] Stern, 'Moses–cide', 197–8.

[18] Dan, *Midrash and Literature*, 128.

[19] For instance, the angel's repeated cry to stay the killing of Isaac—'Abraham! Abraham!' (Gen. 22:11)—need not be a merely rhetorical repetition because the second cry of 'Abraham!' does not address Abraham, but in fact future generations, since all subsequent generations contain men like Abraham. *Midrash Rabbah* vol. 1 Translated by H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 496-7.

[20] Geoffrey Hartman, 'Midrash as Law and Literature' *The Journal of Religion* 74 (1994), 338–355, 339–40.

[21] Paul de Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth' *Diacritics* 17:4 (1987), 4-17; Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), 182-193; Geoffrey Hartman, 'Wordsworth and Metapsychology'

in *Wordsworth's Poetic Theory* Ed. Alexander Regier and Stefan Uhlig (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 195-211.

[22] Hartman, 'Midrash as Law and Literature' 344–45.

[23] Moshe Idel, *Midrash and Literature*, 145–7.

[24] Dan, *Midrash and Literature*, 130.

[25] Avigdor Shinan, 'The late midrashic, paytanic, and targumic literature' in *The Cambridge History of Judaism Volume 4: The Late Roman–Rabbinic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 678–698, 681–2.

[26] Shinan, 'The late midrashic, paytanic, and targumic literature', 682.

[27] Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, 'Against Theory' *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (1982), 723–742, 724.

[28] Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today*. (Second Ed.) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 31.

[29] Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness*, 161.

[30] Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness*, 237.

[31] Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness*, 238.

[32] Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, 3.

[33] Elisa New, 'Pharaoh's Birthstool: Deconstruction and Midrash' *SubStance* 17:3 (1988), 26–36, 27.

[34] G. Douglas Atkins, 'Dehellenizing Literary Criticism', *College English* 41 (1980), 769–779, 776.

[35] Atkins, 'Dehellenizing Literary Criticism', 776.

[36] Susan Handelman, *The slayers of Moses: The emergence of rabbinic interpretation in modern literary theory*. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982), xv, original emphasis.

[37] Handelman, *The slayers of Moses*, 28; 47, original emphasis.

[38] Handelman, *The slayers of Moses*, 124.

[39] Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, 4; René Wellek, 'Destroying Literary Studies', *The New Criterion* 2:4 (1983), 1-8.

[40] Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, 4.

[41] Lilian Furst and Michael Goldberg, 'Review: Interpretation of What? Hartman and Budick's "Midrash and Literature"' *The Journal of Religion* 67:3 (1987), 348-352, 348.

[42] Hartman, *Midrash and Literature*, 3; Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, xiv.

[43] Hartman, *Midrash and Literature*, 8–9.

[44] Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 48.

[45] Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, 'Introduction' in *Midrash and Literature* edited by Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), x.

[46] Stern, *Midrash and Literature*, 105.

[47] Roitman, *Midrash and Literature*, 159.

[48] Daniel Boyarin, 'Old Wine in New Bottles: Intertextuality and Midrash', *Poetics Today* 8:3/4 (1987), 539–556, 541.

[49] Stern, 'Moses–cide: Midrash and Contemporary Literary Criticism', *Prooftexts* 4 (1984), 193–204, 195.

[50] Jacob Neusner, *Midrash as Literature: The Primacy of Documentary Discourse.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 4.

[51] Neusner, *Midrash as Literature*, 6.

[52] Dan, *Midrash and Literature*, 127.

[53] David Stern, 'Midrash and Indeterminacy' *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1988), 132–161, 154–5.

[54] Boyarin, 'Old Wine in New Bottles', 543.

[55] See, for example, Stern, 'Midrash and Indeterminacy', 137

[56] New, 'Pharaoh's Birthstool', 33.

[57] Stern, 'Moses–cide', 202. It is hardly clear, of course, that Derrida or Lacan are 'profoundly secular' readers.

[58] Susan Handelman, 'Fragments of the Rock: Contemporary Literary Theory and the Study of Rabbinic Texts—A Response to David Stern', *Prooftexts* 5 (1985), 75–95, 79. Handelman's argument rehearses a standard linguistic turn argument at times, see 'Fragments of the Rock', 81.

[59] Stern, 'Moses–cide', 203.

[60] David Stern, 'Moses–cide', 194.

[61] Miriam Leonard, *Socrates and the Jews: Hellenism and Hebraism from Moses Mendelssohn to Sigmund Freud* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2012), 59.

[62] Leonard, *Socrates and the Jews*, 92.

[63] Zhang Longxi, 'Cultural Differences and Cultural Constructs: Reflections on Jewish and Chinese Literalism' *Poetics Today* 19:2 (1998), 305-328, 313.

[64] Leonard, *Socrates and the Jews*, 130.

[65] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and other writings* Ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 130.

[66] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2001), 101.

[67] John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion.* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), 231.

[68] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973* Translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 78-89.

[69] See Colby Dickinson, 'The Logic of the "as if" and the (non)Existence of God: An Inquiry into the Nature of Belief in the Work of Jacques Derrida' *Derrida Today* 4.1 (2011): 86–106; Stella Gaon, '"As If" There Were a "Jew": The (non)Existence of Deconstructive Responsibility' *Derrida Today* 7.1 (2014): 44–58; Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*; Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[70] Jacques Derrida, 'Abraham, the Other' in *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida.* Ed. Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Raphael Zagury-Orly (New York: Fordham UP, 2007), 1-35, 33.

[71] Hartman, 'Midrash as Law and Literature', 355

[72] Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, p.1.

[73] Steven D Fraade, 'Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization' *AJS Review*, 31 (2007), 1–40, 2.

[74] Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness*, 176.

[75] Antoine Compagnon, 'The Resistance to Interpretation', *New Literary History* 45:2 (2014), 271–280, 275.

[76] Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 39.

[77] Pierre Bayard, 'Anticipatory Plagiarism' translated by Jeffrey Mehlman, *New Literary History* 44:2 (2013): 231–250.

[78] Redfield, *Theory at Yale*, 64.

[79] Steven Connor, 'Spelling Things Out' *New Literary History*, 45:2 (Spring 2014), 183–197, 185.

[80] E.D. Hirsch, Jr. 'Objective Interpretation' *PMLA* 75:4 (1960), 463-479, 476.

[81] Hartman, *Midrash and Literature*, 9.

[82] Stanley Corngold, 'Error in Paul de Man' *Critical Inquiry* 8:3 (1982), 489-507, 492-3.

[83] Keston Sutherland, 'Wrong poetry', *Textual Practice* 24 (2010), 765–782, 765–6.

[84] Sutherland, 'Wrong poetry', 766.

[85] Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern' *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004), 225–248, 238–9.

[86] Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self: the scholarly imagination, medieval to modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.

[87] Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913–1926* eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 254.

[88] Wai Chee Dimock, 'A Theory of Resonance' *PMLA*, 112 (1997), 1060–1071, 1061.